



# News Release

Attorney General Robert E. Cooper, Jr.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **TENNESSEE ATTORNEY GENERAL ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT TO STOP INTERNET FORUM HOST'S ALLEGED "PAY-TO-POLICE" INTERNET POLICY**

Tennessee and 33 other states and territories have reached an agreement with an Internet message board host to improve consumer protections and to eliminate the fee to expedite review of inappropriate or abusive Internet posts.

Tennessee Attorney General Bob Cooper, on behalf of Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs Director Mary Clement, signed the agreement with Topix.com in an effort to ensure that Tennesseans are not being harmed by "cyber-bullying." Topix.com is a popular website that allows consumers to post comments, polls and surveys in local forums to facilitate discussion about news and other matters of local community interest.

As with any number of open Internet platforms, the forum is subject to abuse by those who wish to post false, misleading or inappropriate material. Consumers have complained about the amount of time it took the company to remove offensive or abusive posts on its site. Some consumers also complained about the company's "Priority Review" policy, which charged \$19.99 to review the posts in a more timely manner.

As part of the settlement, all reports of abuse on Topix.com will be reviewed free of charge. The company will also seek to review and remove inappropriate posts within three working days rather than its previous policy of seven to 14 days.

Additionally, Topix.com has removed the "flagging" option for reporting abusive posts. The option was ineffective and confusing for consumers as it required multiple users to "flag" a post before it was reviewed. As a result, many inappropriate posts consumers thought they had reported were never reviewed. The site has also agreed to make a number of additional technical and human resources improvements in order to better review and block inappropriate posts.

"On behalf of the concerned citizens and public officials who have contacted me about Topix.com, I am pleased that we've been able to reach an agreement with the company," Attorney General Cooper said. "I appreciate the cooperation of Topix.com and look forward to continuing to work with the company to ensure that our citizens are treated seriously and respectfully in a timely manner."

"Consumer Affairs works to facilitate company responsiveness to customer concerns, be it with brick-and-mortar businesses or online ones," said Director Clement, who urged consumers who have complaints about Topix.com or any consumer matter to file a complaint with the Division of Consumer Affairs by calling 1-800-342-8385 (toll-free in Tennessee) or 615-741-4737 or going online to [www.tn.gov/consumer/](http://www.tn.gov/consumer/).